



Joining the National K-16 Movement To Close the Achievement Gap

An Initiative of
THE EDUCATION TRUST, INC.

THE LOCAL K-16 COUNCIL

The local K-16 Council is a civic vehicle comprised of local education, business and community leaders who represent the key stakeholders in education. These leaders come together committed to increase dramatically the success rates among all students, kindergarten to college, with a particular focus on low-income and minority students. They share a willingness to step out of their institutional roles to speak out in behalf of high student achievement and to mount comprehensive and coordinated institutional efforts to close the achievement gap in their communities.

The work of the local K-16 Council focuses first on identifying systemic levers that can change the ways in which schools and colleges do business. Local K-16 partners push each other to take action, paying particular attention to helping teachers and faculty members devise and implement effective strategies for improving student academic achievement in every classroom.

K-16 Council members agree to:

- *Bring together the various reform efforts scattered throughout their K-16 systems into a more comprehensive whole.*
- *Create cross-institutional relationships to collect, analyze, use and report data to the public about areas that need improvement; state publicly what each partner will commit to do.*
- *Set clear, high standards for what all K-12 and college students need to know and do, and align high school exit standards with college admissions requirements.*
- *Work to improve the preparation of new teachers and create effective supports for existing ones; at the same time, design more effective supports for students so that standards are met by all.*
- *Revise incentive structures, K-16, for faculty, teachers, staff, and students to promote and reward increased student success.*
- *Shift more decision-making authority over to the school and/or department level faculty in exchange for holding them accountable for raising student achievement and closing the gap.*

K-16 council leaders have seen that programmatic efforts serving a few teachers here and few students there are simply not enough to reach their goal. The collective work must be directed toward systemic solutions. They also believe that it is not possible to bring about long and deep reform in K-12 education without also changing the way postsecondary does business. This often includes how postsecondary admits and assesses new students, prepares new teachers, rewards faculty and staff, organizes to increase student success as well as how it provides services to schools and school districts. K-16 leaders also agree that, although much has been said about the high international standing of American postsecondary in comparison to K-12, the fact is that both systems are in major need of systemic improvement.

In short, K-16 council leaders have discovered that:

- *Simply creating more projects here and there is insufficient; the focus has to be on systemic actions that get at the core of our systems.*
- *K-12 and postsecondary education systems are really more like each other with numerous interdependencies; the likelihood of improvement in one is dependent on making improvement in the other.*
- *Students rise to the levels we expect of them. Expect too little, they'll give little in return. With well-prepared teachers, rigorous curriculum and a belief that all can achieve at high levels, students do successfully respond to the challenge.*
- *Both levels have to pull together their intellectual and material resources to make the work of closing the gap real and sustainable in the lives of teachers, faculty and their students.*

THE K-16 COUNCIL STRUCTURE

Who sits on the K-16 Council is of utmost importance. Clearly, all of the stakeholders in the community should feel adequately represented. But no one from outside the community can tell exactly who those individuals should be.

A word of advice on this is needed. First, the question about who participates is not only about which institutions to include. Most of all, it is about and must always include those who have the most credibility, authority and trust with students, teachers and faculty. Second, an indispensable requirement is the presence of a strong and positive advocate from the community in order keep the K-16 work bold and frank and to stay focused on tackling the tough issues.

Finally, the question of who participates must respond to the local political landscape. Deciding on K-16 council membership must consider and include those who have the capacity to obstruct change as well as those who can and are willing to make change happen. Bringing potential critics to the table at the outset goes a long way toward building a meaningful consensus for change and a collaborative environment for carrying out the work.

A successful K-16 Council has the following characteristics:

- *Its organizational structure is broad. The CEOs are leaders from school districts, two-year and four-year colleges, business and community. Its structure also runs deep as the work depends on the involvement of the council members' constituents—teachers and faculty, staff, academic leaders, parents and others in the community—in order to get all students to succeed.*
- *Its power lies in its commitment to move away from doing projects that serve only some to actions that target all in our schools and colleges.*
- *Its most effective lever is data, used over and over again, to inform the public about next steps and to push for quick action. The use of data at all levels, but especially by teachers, principals and deans to inform their own planning, is the undergirding strategy of the K-16 council.*
- *Its particular focus is on involving K-12 and postsecondary faculty and staff in the work, sometimes helping each other, other times driving improvements within their own schools and departments.*
- *Its K-16 civic structure is collaborative. The structure requires that the work be done with cross-institutional support and commitment to the goal. It designs new working relationships to push simultaneous change within K-12 and postsecondary.*

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT IS KEY TO SUCCESS

K-16 Council leaders take informed and bold action. They define the big RESULTS they want. Then, they delegate the work, allowing teachers, staff and faculty to figure out how to get there, while the Council provides generous institutional permission, status and support.

Making change happen, however, requires day-to-day management. Without it, the work cannot survive. The successful K-16 Council employs the expert services of at least a half-time facilitator or manager who acts in behalf of the K-16 leaders and makes sure that improvements are being shaped by those closest to the students.

The K-16 council manager must be an effective broker-communicator both with local institutional chief executive officers as well as with teachers/faculty and the community-at-large. The council manager nurtures all aspects of the K-16 council's work.

The main role of the manager includes:

- *Teasing out the elements of the work and helping to devise thoughtful ways to take the work to scale and into the classroom;*
- *Opening lines of communication among and between leaders and the institutional stakeholders they represent;*
- *Fostering a spirit of collegial and focused collaboration to make sure that the work focuses always on student achievement;*
- *Making sure that the work targets systemic action pieces rather than marginal ones.*
- *Conviction that all students can learn to much higher levels;*

The effective K-16 manager possesses the following skills and abilities:

- *Ability to engage and nurture a diverse audience in a collaborative manner and promote across-the-board ownership;*
- *Skill in embracing differences of opinion while being able to channel potential conflict in productive directions,*
- *Disposition to seek input from and maintain open communications with all partners,*
- *Sufficient understanding to conceptualize the priorities of the local K-16 council leaders and the skill to articulate them to the public at large,*
- *Ability to maintain the credibility and grow the capacity of the local K-16 council and its work.*

THE K-16 MODEL

The Education Trust has experience with a variety of Council formats. Individual communities have particular needs and opportunities, and no one outside the community can say exactly who should be on and what roles each should play. But the Trust's experience to date suggests that the following K-16 Council model is likely to have the greatest success in developing and implementing gap-closing strategies.

The Student Achievement/Success Model

The members of a K-16 Council organized along this line view as their primary purpose the improvement of student achievement in both schools and college for all students, especially among poor and minority students. This Council draws most of its members from the schools and colleges, with other local leaders included because of their influence over financial, political and human resources.

The CEO membership of this kind of K-16 Council includes leaders from the following educational institutions and civic organizations:

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| * Four-year college(s) | * School district(s) |
| * Two-year college(s) | * Teacher/faculty Association |
| * Minority Advocate(s) | * PTA or other parent group |
| * Local Public Education Fund/ | * Chamber of Commerce |
| Community Foundation | * Local Advocacy Organization |

Individual communities may find that engaging other partners, particularly from social service, health, housing and similar agencies and organizations, is also useful in addressing related student needs. However, all communities must be alert to make sure that the focus of its K-16 Council remains fixed always on the goal of improved student achievement. The K-16 Council is advocated by the Education Trust first and foremost as a powerful community vehicle to close the achievement gap, K-16, between low-income and minority students and their more advantaged peers.

GETTING A K-16 COUNCIL STARTED

Getting started can be best achieved when the actual invitation to get together comes from a respected education leader—perhaps a school superintendent or college president. Often such leaders have grown tired of the same old marginal efforts yielding the same old results and want to construct more systemic approaches to drive improvements, K-16, for all students in the community.

The first meetings of K-16 leaders should be occasions for informed discussion focused on student achievement in the community. An outside facilitator might be useful in these first meetings in order to keep the conversation targeted and purposeful. Skilled facilitators can also steer the discussion away from non-productive fingerpointing and towards constructive solutions.

The initial meetings of the K-16 Council should address the following issues:

- *Review current data on student achievement and attainment;*
- *Uncover patterns of underachievement and identify levers for change;*
- *Identify local success stories as examples for others to follow;*
- *Tease out lessons learned from current/previous education efforts to improve student success;*
- *Inventory all the various funded projects focused on students, teachers, parents, etc., as well as those administered by outside partners;*
- *Embrace standards and assessments aligned to them;*
- *Invest much more thoughtfully and generously to increase the quality of new and current teachers;*
- *Allow teachers and faculty to have more autonomy and responsibility for getting results;*
- *Design mechanisms that hold all accountable for improved student achievement;*
- *Use data routinely and publicly, especially by teachers and faculty, to inform and compel ongoing improvement;*
- *Define the work for the next twelve months and make it public.*

Selecting an appropriate name for a local K-16 Council can signal that the initiative is about comprehensive improvement in student achievement in both schools and college. The name should project clearly that the council leaders are serious about making improvements and are willing to do things differently.

Here are some examples of council names that are currently being used by other K-16 partner communities.

- North Philadelphia Community Compact for Student Success
- El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence
- The Summit Education Initiative
- Long Beach Education Partnership
- Metro Atlanta P-16 Council

THE EDUCATION TRUST K-16 NETWORK

The movement to create K-16 Councils began in 1993 with the Community Compacts for Student Success initiative administered by the Education Trust and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The original three communities supporting local Compacts have now been joined by more than 35 communities that form a national network of local K-16 councils under the umbrella of the Education Trust.

To become a member of this national network, emerging local K-16 Councils must commit to:

- *Unequivocal involvement by the CEOs of the local K-12 and postsecondary institutions*
- *Creation of a shared discretionary fund to support the work of the Council*
- *Appointment of at least a half-time core staff member to push the Council's work*
- *Commitment to participate in periodic K-16 institutes organized by the Education Trust for the National K-16 Network*
- *Willingness to share publicly lessons learned, problems encountered and successes gained.*

The Education Trust, Inc., based in Washington, DC, receives funding from several national foundations to support its core staff work to grow the national network of K-16 communities. The Trust continually seeks other support sources to advance this work. The Education Trust staff is available to assist local communities in organizing and maintaining K-16 Councils through phone and on-site consultations and visits as well as with materials designed to help with key tasks.

Every year, the Trust hosts at least one planning institute for teams of leaders from communities that wish to establish their own local K-16 Councils. In addition, the Trust annually organizes two three-day Institutes focused on specific aspects of systemic reform for those who already have K-16 councils underway. Moreover, teams from K-16 communities also come together each fall during the Education Trust's annual national conference in the fall at which they are able to network with others doing similar work, present their work as well as learn from each other about provocative reform efforts they are rolling out in local communities. They also pass on strategies about best ways to scale up major efforts to improve student success.

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